

TO BE
FREE



HAFSA AHMED

To be free

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1

A house that hates me

The house was never quiet. Not truly. Even in the early hours of the morning, before the sun had the courage to rise, there were sounds—floorboards creaking under heavy footsteps, the distant hum of the TV left on overnight, the sharp clatter of dishes being thrown into the sink. But the worst sound was the one inside my own head, the one that whispered, *You don't belong here.*

I lay still in bed, staring at the cracks in the ceiling. My room was the smallest in the house, tucked in the farthest corner like an afterthought. The walls were bare, the mattress thin, and the door barely latched shut. It didn't need to. No one ever came in unless they had a reason to. And those reasons were never good.

A sudden bang echoed through the house, followed by the slurred voice of my father. "Get down here! Now!"

My body moved before my mind caught up. Hesitation only made things worse. I swung my legs over the edge of the bed, my feet touching the cold wooden floor. My hands trembled as I pulled my hoodie over my thin frame, a feeble layer of armor against what waited for me downstairs.

In the kitchen, my father stood with a bottle in hand, the stench of alcohol mixing with the stale air. My mother sat at the table, her fingers tapping impatiently against the wood. Her gaze was sharp, dissecting me like I was a problem she had yet to solve.

“You think you can just sleep while the rest of us work?” my father snarled. “The dishes are piling up, and you’re up there doing nothing.”

“I—I didn’t know,” I stammered, my voice barely above a whisper.

He moved fast. The bottle slammed onto the counter, his hand gripping my wrist tight enough to leave bruises. “Then maybe you should pay more attention.”

I swallowed the pain, knowing better than to pull away.

My brother, Leo, leaned against the fridge, arms crossed, eyes filled with the usual disgust. “She’s useless,” he muttered. “Always has been.”

My mother sighed dramatically. “We should’ve sent you away when we had the chance.”

The words weren't new. They should've stopped hurting by now.
But they didn't.

I turned toward the sink, forcing my hands to move, scrubbing
dishes that weren't even mine. My fingers ached from the cold
water, but it was better than standing there, being their target.

Leo bumped into me as he passed, hard enough to make me
stumble. "Pathetic," he whispered under his breath.

I bit my tongue, swallowing the words I wanted to say. Talking
back only led to worse things.

The morning dragged on, filled with orders, insults, and glares
that burned into my back. But this was my life. This was normal.

And deep down, I knew one thing for certain I was
Alone.

--

Caged Bird

A house is not a home to me,
Just walls that hum with misery.
Each step I take, a breaking thread,
A voice unheard, a word unsaid.

I am a shadow in their eyes,
A burden wrapped in silent cries.
Yet still, I breathe, yet still, I stay,

TO BE FREE

A caged bird dreaming of a day.

— —

The cruelty of the world

The school hallways weren't much better than home. If anything, they were just another battlefield. Here, I wasn't just unwanted—I was a target.

I walked with my head down, my hoodie pulled tight over my face. Blending in was my only shield, but even that rarely worked.

“Look who decided to show up,” a voice sneered.

I didn't have to look to know who it was. Mia and her friends. The school's perfect little nightmares. They fed on weakness, and I was their favorite meal.

Before I could react, a hand yanked my hood down, exposing me to the world. Laughter erupted around me.

“What’s wrong, freak? Hiding from us?” Mia’s voice dripped with mockery.

I forced my feet to keep moving, but another girl, Sophie, blocked my path.

“Going somewhere?” she asked sweetly before shoving my books from my hands. Papers scattered across the floor. My homework, my notes—everything.

People walked past without stopping. No one helped. No one ever did.

I bent down to gather my things, my fingers shaking.

“God, you’re pathetic,” Mia sighed, rolling her eyes. “No wonder your own family hates you.”

That one stung. More than I wanted it to.

I clenched my jaw and stood up, gripping my books to my chest. I didn’t look at them. Looking at them would only encourage them.

Mia smirked. “Nothing to say? Thought so.”

With one last shove to my shoulder, they walked away, their laughter ringing in my ears long after they were gone.

I exhaled slowly, steadying myself before heading to class. Another day. Another fight I couldn’t win.

— —

Poem: Unseen

I speak, but no one hears my voice,
A ghost, a shadow—someone's choice.
To be ignored, to fade, to drown,
To wear the weight, to bear the frown.

But ghosts still feel, and shadows break,
And silence is a cruel mistake.
Yet here I stand, yet here I stay,
A whisper lost, a name that fades.

— —

3

Bruises don't fade

I barely made it through the day. Every class felt like a count-down to the next insult, the next shove, the next reminder that I didn't belong. But school wasn't the worst part. The worst part was going home.

I lingered outside the front door, staring at the chipped paint, willing myself to disappear. But I couldn't stand there forever. With a deep breath, I turned the handle and stepped inside.

The air was thick with tension. My father sat in his chair, a half-empty bottle on the table beside him. My mother stood by the stove, stirring something with a scowl on her face. Leo lounged on the couch, his feet propped up, flipping through his phone like he owned the place.

The moment the door clicked shut, my father's eyes snapped to

me.

"Where the hell have you been?"

"School," I answered quietly, keeping my gaze down.

He scoffed. "School. Right. Like you're actually learning anything."

Leo snorted. "She's probably just hiding. It's what she's best at."

I swallowed hard, stepping toward the kitchen. Maybe if I kept moving, if I stayed quiet, they'd lose interest. But my mother blocked my path, her cold eyes narrowing.

"Did you finish the laundry?"

I hesitated. "I—I didn't know I was supposed to."

That was the wrong answer.

Before I could react, her hand struck the side of my face. The sting spread through my cheek, hot and sharp.

"You don't know anything," she spat. "You're useless."

I clenched my fists, forcing myself not to cry, not to react. Tears only made things worse.

My father sighed, taking another swig from his bottle. "Just get

out of my sight.”

I nodded quickly, turning toward the stairs, but Leo stuck out his foot at the last second. I tripped, barely catching myself before hitting the ground.

He laughed. “Oops.”

I pushed myself up and hurried to my room, locking the door behind me. My cheek throbbed. My chest ached. I curled up on my bed, staring at the ceiling, waiting for the pain to fade.

But bruises didn’t fade as quickly as I wished they would.

— —

Poem: Cracks in the Glass

A slap, a shove, a whispered name,
A game they play, a losing game.
They push, they strike, they watch me fall,
A silent scream, a voiceless call.

But glass, though cracked, still holds its shape,
Still stands, still waits, still bears the weight.
And though they try to break me through,
I stand, I stay—I always do .

4

A prison without bars

Chapter 4: A Prison Without Bars

I stayed in my room as long as I could. The walls were thin, but they were the only thing separating me from them. I pressed my forehead against the cold windowpane, watching the street below. Kids rode their bikes, laughing like the world was kind. I wondered what that felt like—to exist without fear.

But peace never lasted long in this house.

A knock rattled my door. No, not a knock—a pounding.

“Open up,” Leo’s voice came, low and sharp.

I hesitated. Opening the door meant trouble. Not opening it meant worse.

Slowly, I turned the lock and stepped back. The door swung

open, and Leo leaned against the frame, arms crossed, a smirk tugging at his lips.

“You hiding again?”

I didn’t answer. That only made him smirk wider.

“You know,” he continued, stepping inside without an invitation, “Mom and Dad might actually like you if you weren’t such a waste of space.”

I swallowed hard, keeping my eyes on the floor.

He circled me like a predator. “I don’t get why you’re even still here. You should just—” He snapped his fingers. “Disappear.”

I clenched my fists.

Leo noticed. His grin widened. “What? You gonna hit me? Go on. Give me a reason.”

I knew better. Fighting back would only make things worse.

He sighed dramatically. “You’re so boring.” Then, without warning, he shoved me.

I stumbled back, hitting the edge of my bed. My knee slammed into the wooden frame, pain shooting up my leg. I bit my lip to keep from making a sound.

Leo chuckled. “Pathetic.”

Then he left, slamming the door behind him.

I sat there for a long time, my chest tight, my hands shaking.

I didn't cry. Crying never changed anything.

--

Dinner was another battle.

I sat at the table, pushing the food around my plate, pretending I had an appetite. My parents barely acknowledged me. It was better that way. But Leo? He never missed a chance.

"So, Mom," he said casually, "guess what I heard at school today?"

My stomach twisted.

Mom barely looked up. "What?"

Leo smirked. "Someone said she got shoved around again. Apparently, she just stood there and took it."

Dad scoffed. "Of course she did."

Mom sighed, shaking her head. "No spine, no worth. God, I can't believe I gave birth to something so useless."

The words hit harder than Leo's shove.

I forced myself to take a bite, swallowing past the lump in my throat. The food tasted like nothing.

Leo grinned, satisfied. "Maybe she likes being a punching bag."

Dad chuckled, taking a sip of his drink. "She must. Otherwise, she'd do something about it."

I wanted to scream. To tell them that I wasn't weak. That I couldn't fight back, because there was no winning against them.

But my voice had been stolen years ago.

After dinner, I washed the dishes while they sat in the living room, laughing at something on TV. Not at a joke. Not at a show. At me. Always at me.

I scrubbed harder, trying to drown out the sound.

The water burned my hands, but at least it was a pain I could control.

--

Poem: Silent Wars

They laugh, they sneer, they cast me low,
A game they play, a cruel show.
Each word, a blade, each glance, a scar,
Each night, I count how far they've carved.

Yet still, I stand, though bent, though torn,
A soul unbroken, though weather-worn.
They think I'm weak, they think I'll fade,
But I am fire—they'll fear the flame.

--

5

Nowhere feels safe

The next morning, I woke up before the sun. Not because I wanted to, but because I had to. Sleeping in meant giving them a reason. A reason to yell, a reason to hit, a reason to remind me why I didn't matter.

I dressed quickly, pulling on the same worn-out hoodie I always wore. It wasn't for comfort—it was for protection. A shield, thin as it was.

Downstairs, the house was quiet, but the air was heavy, thick with the weight of yesterday's anger. It never faded. It only settled, waiting to be woken up again.

I made my way to the kitchen, careful not to make noise. My mother sat at the table, scrolling through her phone, her coffee steaming beside her. She didn't look up when I entered.

“Don’t expect lunch money,” she said flatly.

I didn’t argue. I never did.

Leo waltzed in a moment later, yawning like he had nothing to worry about. His eyes landed on me, and his lip curled.

“You’re still here?” he muttered, grabbing a slice of toast.

I grabbed my bag and headed for the door. The sooner I left, the better.

“Hey.”

I froze.

Dad’s voice. Heavy. Tired. Dangerous.

I turned slowly. He stood in the doorway of the living room, his expression unreadable.

“Don’t come home late,” he said, voice low. “I don’t want to deal with you more than I have to.”

I nodded and left.

—

School wasn’t a break. It was just another kind of war.

I made it to my locker, hoping—praying—that today, they’d ignore me. That Mia and her friends would find someone else to torment.

I should’ve known better.

A hand smacked my books from my arms. Papers scattered across the floor, and laughter echoed in my ears.

“Oops,” Mia said, fake innocence dripping from her voice. “Clumsy much?”

I bent down, gathering my things as quickly as I could.

Sophie leaned against the lockers, smirking. “You should thank us. We make your life interesting.”

Mia crouched beside me, her voice a whisper. “You know, it’s kind of sad. Even your own family doesn’t want you.”

I froze.

She grinned, knowing she’d hit the mark. “Yeah. We hear things. Leo has a lot to say about you.”

Heat crawled up my neck. My hands trembled, but I kept picking up my books, refusing to look at her.

Mia sighed. “Whatever. Have fun being a loser.”

They walked away, laughing, their voices fading into the crowd.

I pressed my books to my chest, forcing my feet to move. The world blurred around me. I just had to survive the day. Just like every other day.

--

Poem: No Escape

Home is cold, school is cruel,
There's nowhere safe, no golden rule.
Words cut deeper than any blade,
And every scar is one they made.

Yet still, I walk, yet still, I breathe,
A ghost unseen, a soul in need.
But shadows stretch, and silence speaks,
One day, they'll know the fire beneath.

--

6

No one sees no one cares

The rest of the school day dragged on like every other. Teachers spoke, students laughed, and I sat in the background, unnoticed. It was easier that way. Easier to be invisible.

By lunchtime, my stomach ached with hunger, but I had no money to buy food. I sat alone in the farthest corner of the cafeteria, pretending I wasn't there.

But pretending didn't change reality.

"Look at her," Sophie's voice cut through the noise. "Sitting all alone like some abandoned puppy."

Mia sat across from me without invitation, her tray of food untouched as she leaned forward, her smile sharp. "It's funny, isn't it? You don't talk. You don't fight back. You just sit here,

taking it. Like you know you deserve it.”

I gripped my hoodie sleeves, my nails pressing into my palms.

Sophie sighed dramatically. “You know, we could make this so much worse.”

Mia tilted her head. “But we don’t. We let you be invisible. Maybe you should be grateful.”

Grateful. For what? For being ignored sometimes instead of tormented?

My chest tightened, but I didn’t speak. I never did.

Mia smirked. “Yeah. That’s what I thought.”

They left, laughing.

I sat there, my appetite gone, my hands shaking under the table.

No one noticed. No one ever did.

— —

The walk home felt longer than usual. Each step heavier. The weight of the day pressing down on me.

When I reached the house, I hesitated. My fingers hovered over the doorknob. I didn’t want to go inside. But I had no choice.

I stepped in quietly, closing the door without a sound. The living room was empty, but the house felt tense.

Then I heard it.

A crash.

A yell.

My mother's voice, sharp as a blade. "You're useless!"

I flinched. Not at the words, but at the sound of something shattering.

I peeked into the kitchen. My father stood there, towering over her, his face red with anger, the remains of a broken glass on the floor.

Leo leaned against the counter, watching with mild amusement. He saw me, and for a second, our eyes met.

Then he smirked. "Look who finally came home."

Dad turned, his eyes narrowing. "Where the hell have you been?"

"School," I murmured.

"Liar." He took a step forward. I shrank back.

Mom scoffed. "She's probably wandering around, trying to

escape this house like a little coward.”

Dad grabbed my wrist. His grip was tight, too tight. “If you ever think about running, don’t bother. No one wants you out there either.”

His fingers dug into my skin, bruising, painful. I bit my lip hard enough to taste blood.

Then he let go, shoving me back. I stumbled, barely catching myself against the wall.

“Go to your room,” he muttered. “I don’t want to see your face.”

I turned and ran up the stairs, shutting my door behind me.

I pressed my forehead against the wood, my whole body trembling.

No one saw. No one cared.

And maybe... no one ever would.

— —

Poem: Unheard

I speak in silence, cry in shade,
A voice unheard, a life betrayed.
Their words are knives, their hands are chains,

A love that only leaves me maimed.

But walls have ears, and scars can talk,
And even whispers start to walk.
One day, my voice will rise, will burn—
And every wound will take its turn.

— —

Breaking inside

I curled up on my bed, pressing my face into my pillow, trying to stop the tears before they came. But it was useless. The moment my body stopped moving, the weight of everything crashed down.

The pain in my wrist throbbed, a darkening bruise already forming from my father's grip. My skin still burned where my mother's words had cut. My heart ached from Leo's smirk, from the way he enjoyed watching me suffer.

I covered my mouth to muffle the sob that forced its way up my throat. I hated crying. Hated the way it made me feel small, weak. But no matter how much I told myself not to, the tears kept coming.

Why? Why did they hate me so much?

I squeezed my eyes shut, my mind racing with everything I wanted to say but never could.

I try. I swear, I try.

But nothing I do is ever enough.

Nothing I am is ever enough.

I wanted to scream. To let out every ounce of pain clawing inside my chest. But the walls were too thin, and my suffering was not allowed to be heard.

Instead, I bit my lip until it bled. Until the physical pain drowned out the emotional one.

I hugged myself, rocking slightly, desperate for comfort—any comfort. But there was no one. No arms to hold me. No kind words to soothe me. Just me. Alone.

Alone.

I curled up tighter, pressing my knees to my chest, wishing—praying—that I could disappear.

Maybe if I was gone, everything would be easier.

Maybe if I just—

No.

I shook my head violently, shutting out the thought before it could take root.

I didn't want to die. Not really. I just wanted the pain to stop.

I just wanted to be loved.

Was that too much to ask?

--

Poem: Drowning in Silence

I reach, I beg, I ache, I cry,
Yet no one stops, no one asks why.
Their words like weights, their hands like chains,
Each day repeats, the same cruel game.

I scream inside, I shake, I break,
But silence is the choice I make.
For if they knew, if they could see,
Would it change what they do to me?

--

8

The weight of another day

--

Chapter 8: The Weight of Another Day

Morning came too soon. The night had been restless, my mind refusing to shut off, replaying every word, every moment of pain. My pillow was still damp from tears, but I didn't have time to dwell on it.

The house was already awake. The sound of clinking dishes, my mother's sharp voice, the low murmur of the news on TV.

I moved carefully, dressing quickly, pulling my hoodie over my head like armor. Maybe today would be different. Maybe today they'd leave me alone.

But I knew better.

I crept downstairs, hoping to escape unnoticed, but Leo was waiting by the door, casually tying his shoes. He glanced up, smirking.

“Did you cry yourself to sleep again?”

I ignored him, stepping past. But his foot shot out, blocking my way.

“Say something, loser,” he said, his tone teasing, but there was a sharp edge to it.

I clenched my jaw. “Move.”

He let out a mock gasp. “Oh? Did the little freak just talk?”

I pushed past him, grabbing the doorknob, but before I could open it, he yanked my hood down.

“Don’t walk around like that,” he muttered, his voice suddenly low. “It makes you look even more pathetic.”

I snatched my hood back up and ran out before he could say anything else.

--

School was no different.

The whispers followed me, the snickers, the casual cruelty

disguised as jokes.

I sat in the back of my classes, my mind drifting.

Would things always be this way?

Would I always be the girl no one wanted?

No.

Something inside me whispered, quiet but certain.

This isn't forever.

For the first time in a long time, I let myself believe it.

Maybe—just maybe—one day, I'd escape.

—

Poem: Caged Hope

A bird with broken, fragile wings,
Yet still it dreams, yet still it sings.
A cage of words, a home of stone,
Yet still it dares to dream of home.

For even walls will crack with time,
And even shadows lose their line.
So though I ache, though I endure,

The world outside still waits, I'm sure.

--

Cracks in the cage

The thought of escape stayed with me.

It was small, fragile—like a candle flickering in the wind—but it was there.

I held onto it as I moved through the day, as I endured the stares, the laughter, the quiet pain that followed me everywhere.

Something had to change.

But I didn't know how.

--

By the time I got home, my mother was already in a bad mood.

I could tell from the way she moved, her heels clicking sharply against the floor, her lips pressed into a thin line.

I tried to slip past her, but her voice stopped me.

“Did you even bother cleaning up this morning?”

I turned slowly. “I—I didn’t have time.”

Her eyes narrowed. “You never have time, do you?”

I opened my mouth, but before I could say anything, she grabbed the closest thing—her coffee cup—and hurled it at me.

I ducked.

It hit the wall behind me, shattering, dark liquid splattering onto the floor.

My heartbeat pounded in my ears.

She sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose. “Look at the mess you made.”

I clenched my fists. I made?

But I didn’t argue. I never did.

“Clean it up,” she muttered before walking away.

I sank to my knees, picking up the broken shards with shaking

hands.

One of the pieces sliced my finger. A thin line of red bloomed
against my skin, bright and sharp.

I stared at it.

Then, slowly, I pressed the cut between my fingers. The sting
grounded me. A reminder.

I was still here.

And one day, I wouldn't be.

--

Poem: Splintered

Glass on the floor, words like knives,
A home of wounds, a life survived.
Blood in the cracks, silence loud,
A world of hurt, a heart still proud.

One day these walls will turn to dust,
And all their weight will turn to rust.
One day these hands won't tremble so,
And I will walk where light will glow.

--

A flicker of rebellion

I didn't clean up the mess right away.

I sat there, staring at the broken pieces of the cup, the coffee staining the floor, my blood mixing with it in tiny red drops.

I should have moved. I should have done what she said.

But something in me snapped.

Maybe it was the way she acted like I was nothing. Maybe it was Leo's smirk, my father's silence, the whispers at school — maybe it was everything.

But for the first time, I didn't listen.

I didn't rush to fix what she broke.

Instead, I pressed my bleeding finger against the floor, watching the way the red smeared.

It was a tiny act of defiance. A pathetic one. But it was mine.

And for a second, it felt like I had control over something.

— —

I cleaned up eventually. I had to. But that flicker of rebellion stayed with me.

The next morning, when Leo tried to trip me at the door, I didn't react. I just stepped over his foot and kept walking.

When Mia whispered something cruel in my ear at school, I didn't shrink. I just stared at her until she looked away first.

Small things. But they mattered.

Because for the first time, I wasn't just surviving.

I was fighting back.

Even if no one else saw it.

Even if it was only in the smallest ways.

— —

That night, I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, the silence pressing in on me.

I still felt trapped. Still felt broken.

But something had changed.

I wasn't just waiting anymore.

I was planning.

One day, I'd be gone.

One day, they'd wake up, and I wouldn't be here.

And that thought—just that thought—made it a little easier to breathe.

--

Poem: The Spark

They push, they break, they tear, they take,
But something in me won't forsake.
A whisper, small, yet burning bright,
A spark that fights against the night.

They do not see, they do not know,
That even fire starts out slow.
But one day soon, this spark will spread—

And I will rise from what they've said.

--

The fire grows

The more I fought back, the more they noticed.

It wasn't obvious. I didn't yell, didn't push, didn't dare to openly defy them. But I stopped making things easy. I stopped flinching when Leo shoved me. Stopped scrambling to obey my mother's every demand. Stopped lowering my eyes when my father spoke.

And they hated it.

--

At breakfast, my mother eyed me as I poured myself a glass of water.

"You didn't finish the laundry last night."

I took a sip before answering. "I was tired."

The room fell silent.

She slowly set her fork down. "Excuse me?"

I swallowed hard. My pulse pounded in my ears, but I forced myself to meet her gaze. "I'll do it today."

Her lips pressed into a thin line. For a second, I thought she'd throw something again.

But then she smiled.

Cold. Sharp.

"Fine," she said sweetly. "No breakfast until it's done."

I expected that. I was already used to going without.

What I didn't expect was Leo suddenly knocking the glass out of my hand.

It hit the floor and shattered, water splashing over my shoes.

I barely had time to react before my father's voice cut through the air.

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

For a moment, I thought he was talking to Leo. But no. His eyes

were on me.

“Look at this mess,” he muttered, standing.

I stepped back automatically. My heartbeat roared in my ears.

Then he grabbed my arm.

Tightly.

Pain shot through me, and I sucked in a sharp breath.

“You’re getting real comfortable talking back, huh?” His voice was quiet, but it sent a chill through me.

I knew better than to respond.

He shook his head, shoving me back. “Clean it up. And don’t let me hear another damn word out of you today.”

I stumbled, catching myself before I fell.

Leo smirked. My mother sipped her coffee.

No one cared.

—

That night, as I lay in bed, the pain in my arm throbbing, I thought about the way his fingers had dug into my skin.

The way they always would.

Because nothing would change. Not if I stayed.

I turned onto my side, staring at the wall, my fists clenching.

I have to get out.

I had no plan. No money. No idea where I'd go.

But I didn't care.

I'd rather be lost out there than trapped in here.

Even if it killed me.

--

Poem: Now or Never

Walls like chains, words like bars,
Bruises bloom like fallen stars.
Every breath, a silent scream,
Every night, a broken dream.

But cracks will spread, and doors will break,
And even cages start to shake.
So here I stand, I will not wait—
The world is mine, I'll choose my fate.

THE FIRE GROWS

— —

.

Dreams In the dark

The only place I ever felt safe was inside my notebooks.

While the world outside tore me apart, my words stitched me back together. I filled every blank page with stories—stories where girls like me weren't trapped, weren't hated. Stories where they escaped.

I wrote late at night, long after the house had fallen silent. The dim glow of my bedside lamp was my only company, the scratch of my pen the only sound.

One day, I'd leave.

And when I did, I'd write a book about all of this. About what it was like to live in a house that felt like a prison. About surviving when no one wanted you to.

Maybe no one would read it.

Maybe no one would care.

But that didn't matter.

Because I'd know.

And for once, that would be enough.

--

The next morning, I hid my notebook under my mattress before heading downstairs.

Leo was already at the table, scrolling through his phone. He didn't look up as I grabbed a piece of toast, but as I turned to leave, he spoke.

"You ever wonder why no one likes you?"

I froze, fingers tightening around my food.

His voice was casual, like he was commenting on the weather. "You're just... pathetic. No friends, no life, always hiding in your room. What do you even do up there?"

I said nothing.

He snorted. "Probably something weird."

I walked out without another word.

But inside, I was burning.

Not with sadness. Not with pain.

With determination.

They could mock me all they wanted. They could push, they could break, they could tear me down a thousand times over.

I would leave.

And when I did, I'd turn every ounce of my suffering into something they could never erase.

— —

Poem: Written in Ink

They speak in fists, they speak in fire,
They steal my breath, they call me liar.
They think their words will cage me in,
But I will carve them into skin.

For paper listens, ink won't fade,
And even pain can be remade.
So when I leave, they'll wonder why—
And find the truth in what I write.

— —

Cracks in the plan

I started saving every coin I could find.

It wasn't much—spare change left on the counter, a few bills forgotten in my father's pockets before laundry—but it was something. Every night, I tucked them into a small tin under my bed, counting them over and over.

Not enough. Not even close.

But I didn't stop.

Because stopping meant staying. And staying meant dying—maybe not in body, but in spirit.

--

At school, I slipped into the library during lunch. Not to study.
Not to read.

To research.

How far could I get on a bus with no ID?
Where could I sleep if I had no money?
How long could a person survive with nothing?

Every answer was terrifying.

But not as terrifying as staying.

I scribbled notes into the back of my notebook, my hands
shaking with the weight of it.

This wasn't just a dream anymore.

It was real.

It was happening.

I just had to make it.

--

That night, as I sat curled up in bed, I wrote.

Not about escape. Not about pain.

But about freedom.

About a girl who ran away and found something better. Who found people who cared. Who found herself.

And for the first time in forever, I let myself imagine it could be me.

One day.

Soon.

--

Poem: Almost Gone

I trace the map inside my mind,
A path to leave it all behind.
A world unknown, a road unclear,
Yet still, it calls—I have to hear.

For even stars must lose their place,
To burn anew in different space.
And even birds with broken wings,
Will find the sky, will learn to sing

Words for sale

Stealing change wasn't enough.

Even if I saved for years, I'd never have enough to survive on my own. I needed something bigger.

Something real.

And then it hit me.

Writing.

It was the only thing I had. The only thing that was mine.

--

That night, I stayed up researching.

There were websites where people posted stories, where they got paid for their words.

It wasn't much. But it was something.

With shaking hands, I made an account under a fake name. A name that wasn't me, because if anyone ever found out, it would be over.

And then I started posting.

Not about my life. Not about the pain.

But about escape.

Stories of girls running, of finding freedom, of carving a new life out of the broken pieces of the old one.

No one read them at first.

But then, one day, someone did.

And then another.

And another.

And then—money. Not much. A few dollars. But when I saw the numbers in my account, my hands shook so badly I almost dropped my phone.

Because this was it.

My way out.

The count down begins

The money trickled in, slow at first, then steady.

Every dollar felt unreal, like a secret only I knew. While my mother sneered at me, while Leo pushed past me in the halls, while my father's voice made my stomach twist—I had this.

A future, growing beneath their noses.

But it still wasn't enough.

Not yet.

--

At school, I sat in the back of class, pretending to take notes while I scribbled numbers in the margins of my notebook.

How much did I need for a bus ticket? For food? For a cheap

place to stay?

Even with the money I was making, I wasn't there yet.

I needed more time.

I just had to survive until then.

--

That night, I typed faster than ever, pouring words onto the screen like my life depended on it.

Because it did.

But my body was betraying me. My hands ached from too much writing, my head pounded from too little sleep.

And I was slipping.

At breakfast, my mother's voice cut through my haze.

"You look awful."

I blinked up at her, still half in the dream world of my stories.
"What?"

She raised an eyebrow. "Are you even sleeping?"

Leo snorted. "She's probably up doing weird freak stuff all

night.”

I forced myself to eat, even though my stomach churned. “I’m fine.”

“Try to look less like a corpse.” My mother sipped her coffee. “People are going to start thinking we neglect you.”

I almost laughed.

But I swallowed it down, along with the bitterness rising in my throat.

I just had to hold on a little longer.

--

Cracks in the plan

The money was almost enough.

I had counted it over and over, running the numbers until they blurred in my tired mind. A bus ticket, a few nights in a cheap motel, enough food to last a week.

It wouldn't be easy.

But it was possible.

Almost.

--

I was more careful than ever. I cleared my search history. I wrote under the covers with my phone on the lowest brightness. I kept my notebook hidden deep beneath my mattress.

But I couldn't hide everything.

And one night, Leo found my money.

--

I had been in the bathroom, scrubbing at the ink stains on my fingers, when I heard the rustling in my room.

My stomach dropped.

I rushed back just in time to see Leo standing by my bed, flipping through my notebook with one hand, the tin of money in the other.

My blood went cold.

He looked up, smirking. "Wow. Didn't know freaks like you got paid."

I couldn't move. Couldn't breathe.

He tapped the tin against his palm. "Where'd you get this? You steal it?"

"No." My voice was hoarse. "Give it back."

He rolled his eyes. "Relax, loser. I don't care. You probably write dumb romance crap for weirdos online." He tossed the notebook onto the bed, but he didn't return the tin.

I clenched my fists. “Leo—”

“Fine, fine.” He threw it at me carelessly, and I scrambled to catch it before it hit the floor.

I checked inside.

The money was still there.

But my hands were shaking. That night, I locked my door for the first time in years.

Leo didn’t care. He was too lazy to put in the effort of ruining my life. But what if he mentioned it to my mother? My father?

I had been careful for so long.

But I was running out of time.

I needed to leave.

Now.

--

Poem: The Final Hour

The walls grow thin, the air grows tight,
I cannot stay another night.

The door's unlocked, the road is near,
I'll leave behind the ghosts in here.

They do not know, they do not see,
That every step is setting me free.
And when they wake, they'll call my name—
But I will never come again.

The escape

I left at midnight.

The house was silent, my heartbeat loud in my ears. I had packed everything hours before—my money, my notebook, a few clothes stuffed into my school bag.

I stood by the door, my fingers trembling over the handle.

This was it.

If I left now, there was no coming back.

I took a slow breath. That's the point.

And then I turned the knob.

--

The night swallowed me whole.

I slipped down the street, sticking to the shadows, my steps quick but careful. The bus station wasn't far. Just a few blocks.

My hands clenched around the straps of my bag, my mind racing.

What if they hear me? What if they wake up? What if I don't make it?

But then I thought of my father's grip on my arm. My mother's sneer. Leo's laughter.

And I ran.

--

The bus station was nearly empty. A few people sat slumped in the plastic chairs, tired and quiet.

I walked up to the counter, heart hammering.

"One ticket," I whispered. "As far as this can take me."

I slid the money forward, my fingers barely steady.

The woman behind the counter barely glanced at me as she printed the ticket. "Bus leaves in ten minutes."

I nodded, swallowing back the lump in my throat.

This was real.

I was leaving.

--

I took a seat by the window, my bag clutched to my chest.

As the bus pulled away, I half expected to see my father's car screeching around the corner, Leo pointing, my mother screaming.

But there was nothing.

Just the empty streets.

Just me.

For the first time in my life, I was free.

--

Poem: The Road Ahead

No voices call, no hands demand,
No chains remain, no harsh command.
The road is wide, the night is deep,
And I am mine—I will not weep.

THE ESCAPE

The past is there, but not my guide,
For I have left that pain behind.
And though the path is dark, unknown,
At last, at last—I walk alone.

— —

Nowhere to go

Freedom wasn't warm. It wasn't bright.

It was cold. It was lonely.

And it was terrifying.

--

The bus rumbled beneath me, the city lights fading into the endless dark. My fingers clenched around my bag, my stomach twisting.

I had done it. I had left.

But now what?

I had no home. No safety. Just a handful of cash and a head full of stories.

I had planned for this, but planning was different from living it.

The bus stopped in a town I didn't know, and I stepped off into the freezing night.

I was alone.

Truly, completely alone.

--

I found a bench in a quiet park, my breath fogging the air.

I wrapped my arms around myself, trying to stop shivering.

I could check into a cheap motel. Get one night of sleep in a real bed. But after that?

The money would run out too fast.

I needed more.

I needed to keep writing.

--

The library was warm.

The next morning, I slipped inside, hiding in a corner with my

phone, my notebook open beside me.

I typed furiously, forcing the words out even though my brain was sluggish from exhaustion.

I couldn't stop.

Every word was survival.

Every story was another step away from them.

I didn't know where I'd end up.

But I wasn't turning back.

Not now. Not ever.

—

Poem: The Price of Freedom

The air is cold, the night is wide,
No place to rest, no place to hide.
The world is harsh, the road is long,
But still, I walk. I must be strong.

No hands to hold, no voice to guide,
Just me, myself, the fire inside.
And though I shake, and though I fall,
I will not crawl. I'll have it all.

NOWHERE TO GO

--

Build from nothing

I learned quickly: freedom came with a price.

Hunger gnawed at my stomach. My clothes weren't warm enough for the cold nights. Sleep was something I stole in quiet corners—bus stops, libraries, the occasional cheap motel when my earnings allowed it.

But I didn't regret leaving.

Not for a second.

--

I wrote more than ever.

Every morning, I found a place with free WiFi—a café, a library, anywhere I could sit unnoticed. I poured myself into my stories,

letting my fingers fly over the screen.

I wrote about loss. About survival. About girls who fought for their lives and won.

And slowly, the money grew.

Not much. But enough.

Enough to eat. Enough to keep moving.

Enough to hope.

--

One day, I checked my account and saw something new.

A message.

I hesitated, my heart pounding as I clicked it open.

“I love your writing. Your words feel real. Are they?”

I stared at the screen.

My fingers hovered over the keyboard. My instinct was to lie. To pretend I was someone else, someone stronger.

But then, for the first time, I told the truth.

“Yes.”

— —

Poem: Written in Fire

I have no home, I have no past,
Yet still, my words are built to last.
I craft, I weave, I shape, I mold,
And turn my pain to ink and gold.

They do not know, they cannot see,
The fire that still burns in me.
And though I walk with aching bone,
I rise, I write—I'm not alone.

To be free

I wasn't supposed to make it.

I wasn't supposed to survive.

But I did.

And now, I was more than just a girl who ran away.

I was a writer.

--

It took months. Months of hunger, exhaustion, and nights spent curled up on cold benches, dreaming of a bed I didn't have.

Months of typing until my fingers ached, selling stories for just enough to eat.

Months of wondering if I had made a mistake.

But I never went back.

And in the end, the words saved me.

--

One morning, I woke up to an email.

I almost didn't check it. Too tired, too used to rejection. But something made me click.

And then I saw it.

A publisher.

A real, actual publisher had read one of my stories. And they wanted more.

--

I stared at the screen, my hands trembling.

I had imagined this moment a thousand times. Had dreamed of it on nights when the cold seeped into my bones, when my stomach was empty, when the world felt too heavy.

But now it was real.

I pressed my hand against my mouth, my breath shaking.

I had done it.

I had won.

--

The deal wasn't huge. No millions, no instant fame.

But it was enough.

Enough to rent a tiny apartment, to buy food without counting coins, to finally—finally—breathe.

I was no longer just a girl running from home.

I was Nova Carter.

And I was an author.

--

Months passed. Then a year. Then another.

And one day, I walked into a bookstore and saw my name on a cover.

My book.

My story.

Everything I had fought for, everything they tried to take from
me, bound in pages and ink.

And when I picked it up, holding it in my hands for the first time,
I knew—

They had lost.

I had won.

--

Poem: To Be Free

They took my voice, they stole my name,
They left me drowning in my shame.
They thought I'd break, they thought I'd fall,
They never thought I'd have it all.

But here I stand, with head held high,
A past behind, a future wide.
No chains remain, no ties to sever,
I am my own—now, and forever.

--

The End.

This is it—the final chapter. Nova’s journey is complete

21

The end

Thank you for reading my first ever book I was inspired to make this story by my dream to become a writer I hope you enjoy it as much as I did as while writing

Xoxoxox ♡♡